

# Five minutes with Wilfried Martens, President of the European People's Party: "Yulia Tymoshenko is a shining example of Ukraine's democratic spirit."

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*Viktor Yanukovich and his government in the Ukraine are under diplomatic pressure over the alleged beating in prison of ex-Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko. [Wilfried Martens](#), President of the European People's Party, discusses with EUROPP editors Chris Gilson and Julian Kirchherr why he has called for a political boycott of this summer's Euro 2012 competition in Ukraine and why he believes that the current government is trying to roll back the freedoms gained in the Orange Revolution.*



**You have called for a political boycott of this summer's Euro 2012 soccer tournament in the wake of the alleged beating in prison of ex-Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko. Can you tell us why you have made this call, and whether or not it will have any effects on the Ukrainian government?**

In March I took the initiative to send a letter to all the heads and deputy heads of government of the European People's Party (EPP) – like Angela Merkel for example – whose teams are represented in the Euro 2012 football tournament. In this letter, which by the way was the first such initiative at the European level, I explain the need to show our political solidarity to Yulia Tymoshenko, who was sent to jail as a result of a staged and politically motivated trial against her. The EPP has said for over a year now that the current regime is systematically rolling back all the democratic freedoms which were gained after the Orange Revolution. The jailing of Yulia Tymoshenko is one of the Ukrainian government's many tactics in order to construct their authoritarian state.

Now, the Ukrainian government sees the Euro 2012 as an opportunity to 'parade' all foreign guests and use them as a smokescreen to hide the on-going democratic repressions and human rights violations. However, even though the EPP and our leaders have nothing against the European tournament, we will not play the game of Ukraine's President, Viktor Yanukovich.

**Tymoshenko is serving a seven-year jail sentence for abuse of office and faces another trial on tax evasion charges. Do you think these charges are justified?**

I am convinced, the EU leaders are convinced, and many world leaders are convinced that these trials are politically motivated. Politicians are judged in elections and the citizens of Ukraine have earned the democratic right to cast judgement on their leaders. But the current regime, which was nurtured in Soviet authoritarianism, sees the democratic opposition as a nuisance to their power-hungry plans.

**When Ukraine was named co-host of Euro 2012 in 2009, its leaders hailed the award as a milestone on the road to joining the European mainstream. How would you describe the Ukraine's relationship with the EU?**

Many things have changed since 2009. The Ukraine of Yanukovich is very different from the Ukraine of 'Orange' governments. The current regime sees Europe strictly in geopolitical and economic terms. It has no interest in European values. And now the regime is paying for its choice: the EU will not sign the EU-Ukraine agreement, EU leaders did not attend the planned summit of Central and Eastern European leaders in Yalta (resulting in the cancellation of the meeting), and EU leaders will boycott the Euro 2012 tournament, and so on. Therefore, if Ukraine still wants to continue on the European path, its government must seriously reconsider its policies and approach.

## What is left of Ukraine's Orange Revolution?

I believe that the spirit of the Orange Revolution is alive and well in Ukraine. Even though the current government is desperately trying to roll back the freedoms gained from the revolution, you cannot roll back the democratic spirit of the Ukrainian people. Ukrainians fought, earned, and live democracy. No one – even those with the best training from the KGB – can take away freedom and democracy from Ukraine. And Yulia Tymoshenko is a shining example of Ukraine's democratic spirit.

## Where do you think will Ukraine be ten years from now?

I truly hope that Ukraine will be much closer to Europe by then. Ukraine deserves a European future.

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*Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.*

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### About the Author

**Wilfried Martens** – European People's Party

Wilfried Martens co-founded the European People's Party (EPP) in 1976 and has been EPP President since 1992. The EPP is the largest and most influential European-level political party of the centre-right, which currently includes 74 member-parties from 40 countries, the Presidents of the European Commission and the European Council, 15 EU and 7 non-EU heads of state and government, 13 members of the European Commission and the largest Group in the European Parliament. Martens was the Prime Minister of Belgium from 1979 to 1992.



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